

Assumption Homily “Medicine for Troubled Times”

Fr. Frank Schuster

It is good to be back from my vacation! I had a good and relaxing time, spending the best parts of it with family. The first weekend I celebrated Mass at St. Jerome at Ocean Shores where my mom leads the choir. It was her birthday and that is the one weekend of the year I truly enjoy preaching to the choir. I think she enjoys it too. The following weekend I spent with my brother and sister’s families on the Oregon coast where we rented a house. I got to celebrate Sunday mass next to a lake there for them. And this last weekend, I got to celebrate Mass at my annual family reunion in Spokane last weekend which included aunts, uncles, cousin, etc. It was a very joyful time for us even though we all carried with us our concerns of what is going on in our country and world today, and with the wildfires and all the smoke in the air. There was a lot of conversation about the recent news of, yet again, Church leaders who have sincerely let us down in a most evil and despicable way. I personally hope they answer for their crimes in this life and the next. Of course, in my moments of extreme frustration, I try to remind myself that the world was an even more difficult and dangerous place to live in during the time of Mary and Elizabeth, if you can imagine life living under the brutality of Roman occupation. There is a lot of sin in our world, throughout the history of the world, and with all the worries, frustrations and anxieties we carry around with us, our Gospel today defiantly presents to us two expectant mothers embracing each other in mutual celebration and sincere hope for the future. It is a startling contrast to the news today and a welcome one.

And so, Mary in the Gospel gives us her Magnificat! That is what we call the wonderful poetry coming from the mouth of Mary, the Magnificat. A miraculous thing had occurred. Mary, a young Jewish girl, had accepted the invitation from the Angel Gabriel to become the Mother of our Lord. Elizabeth, in her old age, had received the blessing of a son who would become the new Elijah in St. John the Baptist. Elizabeth and Mary were blessed with the miracle of life. And this alone was reason for them to embrace and rejoice together. Elizabeth and Mary were also cognizant that they both had even more to celebrate than this. They were the first recipients of the Gospel of Salvation, Mary, especially, for she gave to the invisible God our full humanity.

You see, every doctrine we have about Mary, the Mother of our Lord, is ultimately confessions about what we believe about her son Jesus. Humanity is plagued by sin as we all know. The Church argues that our inclination to sin is the result of the stain of original sin, which I define as that terrible instinct inside of all of us to rebel against God. If God is the Author of life, rebelling against God leads us to death. Original sin can be understood as a spiritual cancer at work in the heart of the human race that makes humanity less than human, which is to say, less than what God had intended us to be. The imagination at work here is if our human nature has been deformed by sin, God’s solution was to send his Son to us with a full human nature so to recreate our human nature for the sake of our salvation, to steer us from the path of death to the path of life.

Theologians rightfully asked the question: how would our divine Lord attain a full human nature unless Mary his mother was also fully human, that is to say, without the stain of original sin? And so in the stormy waters of sin and death, God created an island in Mary. This is why the angel Gabriel describes her as “full of grace”. Through Christ's redemptive activity on the cross, which transcends time, Mary was kept free of original sin so to be fully human, so she could be for us a new Eve, so to speak, a new mother for the human race.

My friends, God does not want human beings to follow the path of death. God wants us to be fully alive, fully human and to live with him forever. Through Mary, Jesus gains the original vision of what it means to be fully human, a vision we can all share in by living our baptism in the Body of Christ. And this brings us to our feast day today of the Assumption of Mary.

You see, if Mary was born originally fully human, it simply isn't fitting that she should taste death the way we do. Like the angel who recognized that Mary was full of grace, which is to say fully human, it is more fitting that Mary be assumed into heaven body and soul. Because of her unique relationship with Christ, it is fitting that Mary be the first to receive the gift Christ wants to give us all: eternal life with God. How wonderful that the first recipient of this gift would be a woman who, when she was a poor teenage Jewish girl, said yes to God and not no. How many of us can find ourselves saying no to God when we really should be saying yes. Mary's “yes” makes her the first disciple, the first model for us all, but she is also hope for us all.

In the Gospel today, Mary has a moment of profound joy when she praises God for the good he has done. Today also offers us an opportunity I think for a moment of defiant joy in the midst of so many worries we face in the world today and in our own lives. There is so much going on in our world that can tempt us away from joy. Again, the Church's remedy for this is to show us two expectant mothers embracing each other in celebration of the hope they have in the future. This is good medicine. We need their hope. We need to make their hope our hope. The invitation today is to share their hope and share their joy regarding the salvation promised us by God through Jesus Christ, as heralded by John the Baptist. Even with all the worries that surround us each day, our faith in Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life, gives us a reason to join Mary in her timeless prayer, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my savior”.